

Ticking the 'Other' Box: Positional identities of East Asian academics in UK universities, internationalisation and diversification

Terri Kim¹ and Wilson Ng

Abstract

This paper critically interrogates East Asian academics' positional identities in UK universities, internationalisation and diversification against the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework. Contemporary UK policy promoting racial equality and diversity is often over-generalised, while the critical race theory-based literature has focused on hegemonic notions of 'white privilege'. This discourse does not provide an adequate, comparative perspective of power relations within diverse racial and ethnic groups. The paper compares and contrasts the experiences of two groups of East Asian academics working in UK universities. The first group is foreign-born but has strong British identities following their English élite education. The other group came to the UK for postgraduate studies and /or have chosen to work in Britain. The paper changes the picture of a static, black and white perspective in the BME policy and CRT literature by offering a dynamic, fluid discourse involving East Asian academics' narratives of their positional identities and choices.
(158 words).

Key words: East Asian academics, BME, Critical Race Theory, Yellow Peril, Model Minority, Positional Identities, Internationalisation, Equality and Diversity

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Ticking the 'Other' Box: Positional Identities of East Asian academics in UK universities, internationalisation and diversification²

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Introduction

This paper critically interrogates East Asian academics' positional identities in UK universities, internationalisation and diversification against the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework from a comparative and historical perspective. What does internationalisation and widening participation in universities mean in the context of racial and ethnic diversity? Recently there have been a number of evidence-based research reports on the under-representation of black and minority ethnic (BME) academic staff in leadership roles in UK Higher Education (UK HE): e.g., ECU, 2011; 2014; Bhopal and Jackson, 2013; Morrow, 2015; Bhopal and Brown, 2016; Adams, 2017.

However, there remains a paucity of knowledge on the interface and possible disparity between 'international' and 'minority ethnic' academic identities, and their respective or entwined experiences. This can be strategically important for the future of UK Higher Education given that the overall proportion of non-UK born, international academics employed in UK universities is expected to rise to 50 per cent by 2027 (Universities UK, 2007, p. 10). Such demographic forecasting implies that the continuing success of UK universities would be increasingly dependent on international academics. In her previous research, Kim (2009; 2011) argued that international academics can enrich the intercultural dimensions of leadership and bridge the gap between 'internationalisation' and widening participation' agendas of UK HE.

Furthermore, the UK's impetus towards Brexit has made the nexus between internationalisation and equality/diversity policy in UK Higher Education an urgent issue for clarification because of the question of national and ethnic identity that Brexit has thrown up for all non-UK citizens. The uncertain terms and conditions depend on the post-Brexit UK immigration policy and the scope of EU human rights measures in UK law that will affect both EU and non-EU international staff and students.

Contemporaneously, however, the UK policy agenda for racial equality and diversity is relying on the over-generalised BME category which includes anyone "non-white", and also being separate from the 'internationalisation' agenda. In conjuncture with the BME category, the literature on racial equality and diversity often draws on a Critical Race Theory (CRT), which sees all social arrangements as structured by the premise of 'white privilege' and 'white supremacy' and accordingly argues that concepts of 'race' and ethnicity have continued to shape 'fundamental' individual identities (Cole, 2017; Winant, 2004). An

² The interest in doing this research on East Asian academics' narrative accounts of internationalisation and diversification in UK higher education came up as a part of the first author's ongoing LFHE-funded research on tracking the impact of BME academic leadership development programme. It is acknowledged that a part of research data (two interviews) is from the LFHE-funded project.

immediate problem of this BME-CRT framework, however, is this simple juxtaposition of 'white' versus 'non-white', where protagonists in this discourse are always either white or black; hence, there is no room for 'neither white nor black' ambivalent positioning.

Overall, it is argued that the two sets of policy discourse – i.e. the contemporary market-oriented internationalisation policy³ on the one hand and the BME-CRT framed equality/diversity policy on the other - does not provide a holistic apprehension of intricate inter-and intra-national relations and diverse ethno-racial power dynamics within the UK HE environment (Kim, 2011). Against the background, this article examines selected East Asian academics' lived experiences, positional identities and their (im-)mobilities in the UK. We argue that despite the legacy of "yellow peril" (in the 19th and 20th centuries), East Asian ethno-national and cultural norms have now gained a new recognition and rationality in the contemporary rise of East Asian power (Cox, 2012; Jacques 2012). These norms are strong and distinct in their antecedents and developmental pathways and deviate from Western hegemonic narratives. However, the ways in which this meta-narrative change is translated into the micro-level of individual lived experiences requires attention.

To explore this proposition, the paper adopts a narrative-constructivist methodology and intersectional approach based on biographical narratives. Drawing on C. Wright Mills' (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*, the paper then analyses biographical narratives and highlights the intricate entwinement between individual lived experiences and social structures and movements, and a wider, historical setting in terms of their subjective meanings for, and careers of, the East Asian academics in this study.

The research findings change the picture of a black and white, dominant perspective in the BME policy and CRT literature by substituting a dynamic and fluid discourse involving East Asian academics' positional identities and career choices in UK universities. The significance of this changed picture is explored in terms of its possible effects on the policy discourse on equality and diversity.

For that purpose, the following section examines international and racial-ethnic profiles of the academic profession and leadership in UK universities to clarify the context of our research analysis.

Interface or disparity between internationalisation and equality/diversity in the UK academic profession and leadership

It has been widely reported that BME staff are underrepresented at senior levels in UK HE (Bhopal and Jackson, 2013; ECU, 2014). According to the HESA data published in 2017, there are still no black academics in senior management positions in any British universities for top management roles for third year in a row. Among the 535 senior officials surveyed at 163 UK universities, 510 were white, 15 were 'Asian' and 10 were recorded as 'other,

³ The major driving force behind the internationalization policy and practice in the UK is 'economic' – neoliberal competition for global market share, indirectly of student and research markets, and directly for economic position within a world knowledge economy (Kim, 2009).

including mixed' (HESA, 2017). The HESA data (2017) also reveal that just 9.7 per cent of BME academics are professors, in comparison to 11.1 per cent of white academics.

However, there is significant variation among those identified as "BME" professors. Chinese (14.0%), and other ethnic (13.5%) staff were more likely to hold professorial roles than their Asian (meaning South Asian in the UK) (9.8%), mixed (7.8%) or black (7.5%) counterparts. Furthermore, when we look at the proportion of BME professors in terms of nationalities, only 4.7 per cent of black UK academics are professors. In Oxford, the proportion of BME non-UK nationals among the academic and research staff (combined) is 18 per cent compared with 9 per cent of the BME UK nationals (University of Oxford, 2016, p. 29). Among the non-UK (i.e. international) academic staff, 4.3% of BME staff were professors compared to 9.4% of white non-UK academic staff (Arday, 2017, p. 5).

According to the report by Equality Challenge Unit (2015), there are just 20 UK-born BME deputy or pro vice-chancellors, compared with 530 white ones (re-quoted from Ahmet and Howarth, 2016); and more recently, Higher Education Funding Council in England (Hefce, 2017) reports that only 3 per cent of vice-chancellors and principals (University Presidents) were BME. These proportions are even lower when international staff are *excluded*" (<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/HEinEngland/workforce/equality/>).

Among the UK's top 50 universities, only three universities are led by BME vice-chancellors: University of Surrey (Gaoqing Max Lu (逄高清), SOAS (Baroness Valerie Amos) and the LSE (Dame Minouche Shafik), and all three of them have taken unconventional routes to the top. Baroness Amos has been a British politician and diplomat as the UN Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator and former Labour Cabinet Minister; Lu and Shafik are international. Before assuming the Vice-Chancellorship at Surrey, Lu is a Chinese–Australian chemical engineer and nanotechnologist. He was Provost and Senior Vice-President at the University of Queensland, Australia, where he spent nearly 30 years. he was the founding director of the Australian Research Council (ARC) Centre of Excellence for Functional Nanomaterials and previously had worked in Singapore (Nanyang Technological University) as well (<https://www.ukri.org/about-us/governance-and-structure/uk-research-and-innovation-board/professor-max-lu/>). Max Lu is the only Chinese East Asian Vice-Chancellor in the UK. Shafik, an Egyptian-born American-British economist did her post-graduate studies at LSE and Oxford and made her career at the IMF, World Bank and the Bank of England. Overall, none of them have worked their way up through the traditional academic pipeline in the UK HE system (Kahn, 2017).

On the other side of the Atlantic, in comparison, BME academics and leaders seem to be more visible. According to the American Council on Education (ACE) Demographic Overview (2017), 17% of American University & College Presidents are racial minorities - increased by four percentage points since 2011; and the percentage of women holding the top job at colleges and universities stood at 30 percent in 2016 (<http://www.aceacps.org/minority-presidents/>). More than half of the Ivy League Universities (Brown, Pennsylvania, Harvard, Princeton, and Cornell) have had female presidents since 2000 (Seltzer, 2017: The Slowly Diversifying Presidency, 20 June 2017: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/06/20/college-presidents-diversifying-slowly-and-growing-older-study-finds>). After Brown University appointed the first female black

president among the Ivy League Universities, seven small, highly selective liberal arts colleges - not known for diversity - have also appointed black presidents for the first time since 2013 (Lewis, 26 Oct. 2016: <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/college-game-plan/students-all-races-welcome-first-black-presidents-largely-white-colleges-n674021>).

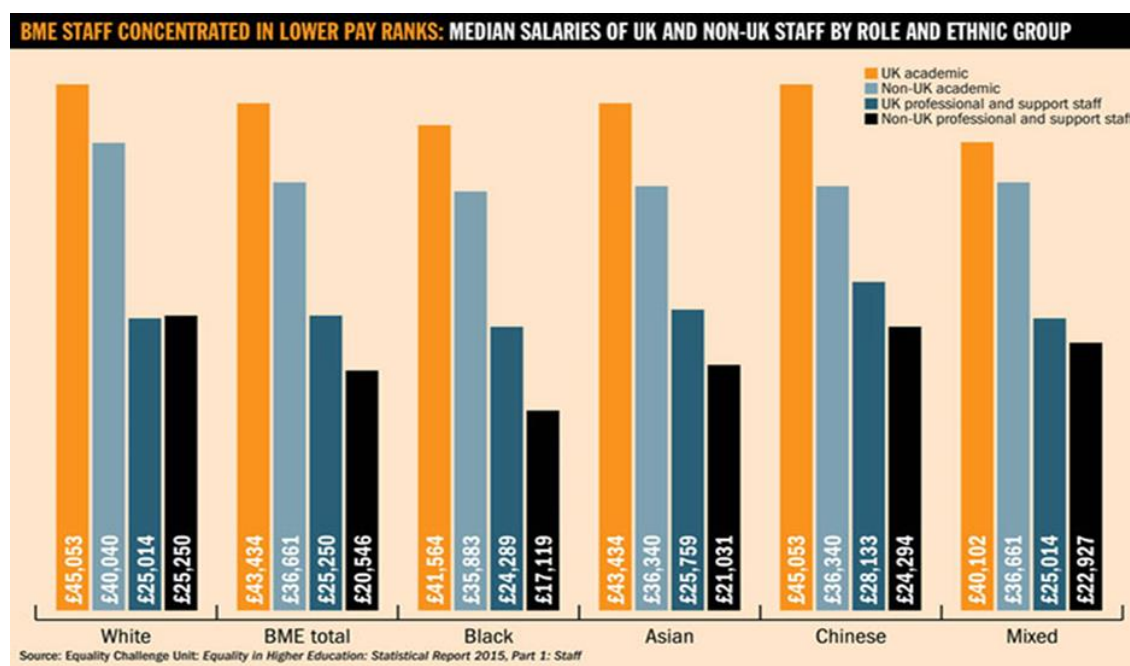
In the UK, although non-UK nationals, in general, are less represented than the white British academics in senior positions, when we look at the BME group separately, the international/non-UK BME academics, especially Chinese and other minority ethnic backgrounds, seem to be better represented than the local/UK-national BME academics in UK universities.

Furthermore, racial disparity among the international BME group is more visible in Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) areas. There are 8,300 professors in SET in UK universities, but only 35 are black, and the majority of these black professors in SET are international – i.e. they did not go to school in the UK.

However, when we study the gender balance among black academics, racial disparity is even more apparent: 23.9 per cent of professors were female. Of these female professors, only 0.5 per cent were black (HESA, 2017). There are just 54 BME female Professors (full professorial position) and 350 BME female academics in the UK, out of a total number of 18,000 professors across the UK, meaning that BME women make up less than 2% of the UK academic profession (ibid). Overall, most higher education institutions in the UK do not employ any BME woman professor (Runnymede Trust, 8 March 2017: <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/blog/black-female-professors-in-the-uk>).

All in all, given the striking gender imbalance and BME underrepresentation (especially black UK nationals) in the UK academic profession generally, and in academic leadership in particular, the experiences of BME academic staff are often treated as a 'special case' in UK universities. However, race and ethnicity are not only individual characteristics, but also a social or political issue with personal and collective meaning, which may become salient within the context in which academics are positioned. Some BME academics reported that they suspected they had been appointed on a lower starting salary than white colleagues (Bhopal and Jackson, 2013). However, as indicated in the following ECU statistical report (2015), there are variations:

Figure 1: Median Salaries of UK and non-UK staff by Role and Ethnic Group



(Source: ECU Statistical Report, 2015. Part 1: Staff)

For instance, Chinese UK academics earn as much as white UK academics, whereas non-UK academics earn less than their UK counterpart *regardless of ethnic backgrounds*. Black academics tend to earn less than White and Chinese and Asian groups.

But what about East Asians? We assume that the Asian group in this chart may include East Asian ethnic groups. However, Asian means South Asian in the UK in general, and thus combining South Asian and East Asian academics does not help to get a precise picture of equality and diversity in line with the racial and ethnic profiles of staff in UK HE.

Bhopal and Jackson (2013) suggest that BME academics have more detours in their career progression than white colleagues. They are often perceived that they needed to work harder compared to their white colleagues, and to meet higher thresholds for promotion. They argue that the real problem lies in the fact that universities tend not to recognise and may even devalue the provenances, styles, expressions and substance of diverse ethnic identity and cultural capital. Accordingly, the official line of policy recommendations in their LFHE report was that there should be more principled diversity at the highest levels, which would contribute to the making of a less mono-cultural university environment for BME academics to inhabit (Bhopal and Jackson, 2013).

Furthermore, Bhopal & Brown (2016) suggest that unconscious bias training should be made mandatory for all staff on university recruitment and promotion panels to help eliminate potentially racist hiring decisions. Based on interviews with 15 BME academics in leadership positions and a survey of 127 BME university leaders, they found that 'several' BME staff members believed unconscious bias was responsible for their failure to get promoted in the first instance (Bhopal & Brown, 2016).

However, how do we extract the nature of 'unconscious' bias and articulate the causes of these alleged unconscious bias? Does racial & ethnic difference make a major attribute to such bias, or is there something else more complicated and hidden?

As ECU (2011) also suggested, it is difficult to attribute race and ethnicity as the underlying explanatory factor behind *all* adverse experiences that BME staff members have in UK HE, and in many cases, according to the ECU report (2011), BME staff members prefer not to complain about quite clear cases of discrimination for fear of escalating a problem and endangering their longer-term career.

Meanwhile, Bhopal (2016) identify five key principles to underpin the Race Charter Mark:

- that racism is part of everyday life and racial inequalities manifest themselves in everyday situations, processes and behaviours;
- that individuals from all ethnic backgrounds should benefit equally from the opportunities available to them;
- that solutions to racial inequality should have a long-term impact through institutional culture change;
- that those from minority ethnic backgrounds are **not a homogenous group** and such **complexity** must be recognised when exploring race equality;
- and that **intersectional identities** should be considered when discussing race equality.

Among these principles that we fully endorse, our agenda of attention is drawn to the last two in particular, as the basic premise of our research focusing on East Asian academics - whose collective voices have not been heard in the mainstream BME policy narratives, and whose positional identities in UK universities have not been examined in line with racial equality and diversity policy in the UK HE sector. The next section will interrogate these issues via intersectionality and critique the limits of BME-CRT framework.

Intersectionality and the limits of BME Policy and CRT framework of analysis

The UK policy discourse promoting racial equality and diversity (since 2010) has been constrained by the ONS (Office for National Statistics in the UK) racial/ethnic categories⁴. The 'BME/BAME encompasses all non-white individuals, in which the 'Asian Others' category includes anyone from the Asian continent - except South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladesh) and Chinese and Arab, whose categories exist separately. How can we say anything significantly common in this hotchpotch of the 'Asian Others'?

⁴ ONS categories are White (British, Irish, Gypsy or Irish Traveller, Other White); Mixed/Multiple (White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian; Other Mixed); Asian/Asian British (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladesh); Chinese; Other Asian; Black/African/Caribbean/Black British (African, Caribbean, Other Black); Other ethnic group (Arab, Any other ethnic group):
(<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/2011censusanalysisethnicityandreligionofthenonukbornpopulationinenglandandwales/2015-06-18#main-points>).

Similarly, the 'White Other' category (first introduced in 2001) is undiscernible as it bunches together Western Europeans, Northern Europeans, and Eastern Europeans, plus white Americans and Australians. How can we say anything meaningful about such diverse ethnic-nationalities together categorised as the 'White Others'? The underlying assumption of this classification is arguably found in the critical race theory-based literature that has focused on hegemonic notions of 'white privilege'.

Allport (1954) suggested that categories are rational if based on evidence and formed by rational logical processes, and irrational if lacking evidence and formed emotionally, and ethnic stereotypes are typical examples of irrational categories:

This propensity [of a human being to prejudice] lies in his normal and natural tendency to form generalizations, concepts, categories, whose contents represent an oversimplification of his world of experience. His rational categories keep close to first-hand experience, but he is able to form irrational categories as readily. In these even a kernel of truth may be lacking, for they can be composed wholly of hearsay evidence, emotional projections, and fantasy.

(Allport, 1954, p. 27; Requoted from Carvalho, 1993, p. 302).

Ethnic minorities can use race and ethnicity as a strategic resource. Social identity and leadership theories thus implicitly acknowledge racial hierarchies and unequal power dynamics, while race and ethnicity are viewed as both personal and collective, in that individuals make choices about managing their own racial identity (Tillman, 2004; Ospina and Foldy 2009). As Stuart Hall proffered, identity is "a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation." In addition,

"identity...is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'... Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (Hall, 1974; Re-quoted from Oray, 2013, p. 257).

However, as inferred from the ONS categories, there is still insufficient open debate about race/ethnicity in the UK in general, and in the UK higher education sector in particular - despite the 'intersectional' contexts of equality and diversity and mobility and internationalisation.

An example here are British white working-class academics. Recently there was a special event discussing 'Does Class Still Matter?', where a several senior female professors, who defined themselves with 'white working-class' family backgrounds, gave powerful biographical testimonies in relation to class-related discrimination in academia. Yet at the same time they acknowledged their 'white privilege'. No one questioned the academics' notion of 'white privilege' as if that is the universally accepted norm.

On the contrary, our interview data as well as Kim (2017)'s long-term research analysis of transnational mobile academics suggest that both national cultural origins and class distinctions (*rather than race/ethnicity*) are considered major attributes that determine the positional identities of international mobile academics. There are still old hierarchies in the world society of (nation) states, often determined by ethno-national identities and citizenships "like feudal birth right privileges" (Carens, 1987, p. 252) and which are most

acutely pronounced in the processes and consequences of transnational mobility and migration in general (Kim, 2017).

However, national citizenships are sub-classified by racial/ethnic identities in many multiracial countries like the United States, Australia, and the UK. On the other hand, in France, for instance, as well known, citizens cannot be categorised by race and ethnicity. All in all, it is important to recognise different legal and cultural conceptions of equality and race in a specific national social context.

Different societies apply differing criteria regarding who is classified as "black", and these social constructs have also changed over time. In a number of countries, societal variables affect classification as much as skin colour, and the social criteria for blackness vary. In the USA, for example, the term "black" people is not just an indicator of skin colour or ethnic origin, but has been a social classification of African Americans with a family history associated with institutionalised slavery. The ideological notion of 'whiteness' in America is strongly argued by Noel Ignatiev (1995) in his seminal book, *How the Irish Became White*. Ignatiev (1995) explains how the Irish-American with oppressed Irish peasant immigrant backgrounds were quickly able to adapt to the white supremacy racial discourse:

'By oppression - like gender oppression or class oppression or national oppression - we find further footing for analysing... the peculiar function of the "white race"... The hallmark of racial oppression is the reduction of all members of the oppressed group to one undifferentiated social status, a status beneath that of any member of any social class (Ignatiev, 1995: pp. 1-2).

In the UK, however, "black" was historically referring to "a person of colour", a general term for non-European peoples. Furthermore, in the Marxist-CRT framework, ethnic minorities in the UK have been regarded as a racialised class fraction within the wider 'working class' (Miles 1982). For instance, when Runnymede Trust published the list of 'Black Female Professors' in March 2017, the 'black' category meant non-white. The list includes 54 BME women professors of 'African, Asian (including East Asian) and Caribbean' origin and descent, and among them, many are South Asians and Asian Others (including 15 Chinese and East Asians such as Japanese, Korean, Chinese Malay/Singaporeans (<https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/BlackFemaleProfessorsMarch2017.pdf>). Also, the BME equality and diversity policy in UK HE tends to elide with the Widening Participation in HE policy, which states that "the specific needs of BME students have become subsumed within generic widening participation policies" (Runnymede, 2011, p. 4: [https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/WideningParticipation-2011\(Online\).pdf](https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/WideningParticipation-2011(Online).pdf)).

However, many East Asians we encounter in everyday academic life (including those East Asian academics interviewed in this research) are not critically aware of this racial classification labelled as 'black'. Some of them we interviewed were not even aware that they were categorised as "BME" in policy terms.

So, what are the East Asian academics' positional identities? Who are they? Is there ambiguity to categorise them in the BME-CRT framework of analysis? Overall, we find the East Asian academics almost invisible in the exiting literature on racial equality and diversity in the UK.

Positional Identities of East Asian Academics in UK Universities

Shilliam (2015) argues that “universities remain overwhelmingly administratively, normatively, habitually and intellectually ‘white’. Their doors have been opened but the architecture remains the same” (p. 33). However, our initial observation is that East Asian academics in the ‘white’ UK university environments as such do not voluntarily identify themselves in the BME group, but at the same time they would not be automatically included or categorised in the “ivory tower” either. Hence, there may be double marginalisation by number and symbolic representation of East Asian academics in UK universities.

Methodology

To explore our proposition, we adopt a narrative-constructivist methodology and an intersectional approach to recognise ethnic-nationality, socio-economic class, gender, prior education and career trajectories, social and cultural identities, as well as age that are all likely to influence perceptions and positional identities. Drawing on C. Wright Mills (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*, this paper offers biographical narrative analyses to highlight the intricate entwinement between individual lived experiences and social structures and movements, and the course of world history - in order to “understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life [as embodied subjectivity] and the external career of individuals [East Asian academics selected for this study]” (Mills, 1959, p. 5).

The paper compares and contrasts the experiences of two distinct groups of East Asian minority ethnic academics working in UK universities. The first group of academics was foreign-born but has retained strong emotional connectivity with the UK following their English élite education and local networks that they built and continue to maintain since childhood. In this article, élite education refers to primary and secondary schooling at private boarding schools that are members of the Headmasters’ and Headmistresses’ Conference of independent, privately owned schools (cf. Wilkinson, 1964, p. 8). Our other group of academic respondents came to the UK initially for postgraduate study and/or have chosen to work in Britain as academics.

For this project, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve East Asian academics, namely, two Chinese, one Chinese Australian, one Taiwanese, one Taiwanese Canadian, one Korean, one Korean American, one Japanese, one Vietnamese, one Filipino, and two Malaysian Chinese. These Malaysians, who make up Group 1, came to England as teenagers to attend élite boarding schools, and they then went up to Cambridge University. The other ten East Asian academics, who comprise Group 2, were educated either in their home countries or internationally, in Australia, America, and Canada. Some of these academics proceeded to the UK for postgraduate degrees in political/social sciences and natural/human sciences at various British universities). These academics then stayed on, while others came to the UK for employment after studying and working in their home countries or elsewhere (e.g. North America, western Europe). We refer to Groups 1 and 2, together, as ‘Chinese and Minority Ethnic’ (CME) as a convenient term that contrasts with BME. In our Discussion, we suggest how both labels, with the catch-all behaviour that the

practice of each category demands, can in fact harm ethnic minorities that BME policy seeks to protect.

The authors of this article who conducted research interviews are both London-based East Asian academics: The first author is a Korean non-UK national, while the co-author is a Malaysian national. In a phenomenological framework of thinking and narrating the collected interviews, we are critically aware of the significance of reflexivity in this research analysis as the researchers' social positions (both positioning and being positioned) and embodied knowledge could influence our assumptions. On the other hand, this reflexivity could also provide useful insights based on the authors' ability, based on their positioning within the subject of their research, to weave plausible narratives from data that may appear puzzling and contradictory (see, for example, Ng & De Cock, 2002; Alvesson, 2003).

In terms of positioning, Jean Paul Sartre saw the "gaze" as the battleground for the self to define and redefine itself. The gaze of the 'Other' is outside our immediate control and the way the gaze objectifies us and robs us of our freedom as a subject (Requoted from Kim, 2014, p. 61). Modern European elites in the Enlightenment period used to assume 'the standpoint of universality' but they blindly turned it into 'the universal standpoint' in building the empires. The latter standpoint/positioning leads to the 'pressure of universalization', which pushes the self and the other under its compulsion (ibid, p. 68). Analogically, it can be argued that there is a similar tendency in the BME policy research framework. East Asian academics in UK universities are almost invisible. They are a real minority in number, and their voices have not been heard along with the racial equality and diversity policy discourse. After all, invisibility may have been the stereotype of East Asians in the UK BME policy narratives. If there is the over-generalised BME stereotype in the UK that made East Asians invisible, there is a "model inority" myth as the most persistent stereotyping of East Asians in the USA.

From yellow peril to the model minority and back again

The model minority myth was initially coined by American sociologist, William Petersen in his article, 'Success story: Japanese American Style' published in the *New York Times* in 1966⁵). Frank Wu (2002) pinpoints that the model minority stereotype is dangerous and harmful because it is a racial stereotyping. Once we accept this racial generalisation, it goes all sorts of places, stereotyping East Asian characteristics such as hard working, good at math and science, submissive and keeping their heads down, etc. (F. Wu, 2002; E. Wu 2015). In consequence, the model minority myth has been false flattery as it is not even really about people of East Asian descent but to isolate and pit East Asian Americans against other minority groups such as African-Americans and Hispanics. Ellen Wu (2015)'s book, *The Color of Success* traces the origins of the model minority stereotype and its use during the Cold War and 1960s civil rights movement. Asian Americans assimilated to American culture to shed negative stereotypes about them and to achieve respectability in American society. Ironically then, the model minority stereotypes can serve to reintroduce a new form of the "yellow peril" that has plagued East Asian immigrants in the United States since the late

⁵ Petersen, W. (1966) Success Story, Japanese-American Style, *New York Times*, Jan 9, 1966: http://inside.sfuhs.org/dept/history/US_History_reader/Chapter14/modelminority.pdf.

19th century (Allred 2007). When Chinese immigrants first landed in the US in the 1800s, white America saw them as heathens. The xenophobia and discrimination escalated. The overtly anti-“Asian”⁶ government then introduced the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, which prohibited the entry of Chinese persons into the U.S. for ten years. During World War II, the Japanese American internment is another well-known example of yellow peril. Philip E. Vernon (1982) describes how Chinese and Japanese immigrants in the United States and Canada were regarded then:

“as a kind of inferior species, who could be used for unskilled labor and menial jobs, but could never be accepted as equals into the white community. And yet Orientals survived and eventually flourished until they came to be regarded as even higher achievers, educationally and vocationally, than the white majority” (Vernon, 1982, p. ix).

Against this backdrop of the yellow peril view to the model minority myth, we argue that the UK Equality and Diversity policy based on a one-size-fits-all view of non-white academics’ career development can actually harm the career development of a number of non-white academics. Accordingly, this view may have had the unintended consequence of distancing some East Asian academic elites from their respective academic communities when the opposite is intended by the current policy framework.

“Ambidextrous” East Asian British academics’ positional identities

The two cases in Group 1 contrast with data in Group 2 although both individuals in Group 1 identified themselves as East Asian Chinese and continue to hold Malaysian citizenship. Firstly, MC1, having worked in Oxford and then London University, chose to progress his career in Singapore where he had not previously worked:

“There were few opportunities in the UK in 1990 for clinicians, and I didn’t want to end up in Stockton or Carlisle or Southampton or wherever they sent you. Also, I wanted to research and I believed that the only real centers for quality medical research was in Oxbridge and London because of their reputation and funding. It was simply impossible for any clinician in the UK to know where he would be posted and this opaque, top-down thinking was a turn-off for young medics looking to build a research stream.”

MC1’s experience suggests that, given his education, the BME label may be disadvantageous for his career as it seems to surface a non-existent issue of ethnicity. In fact, the unwanted attention to MC1’s ethnicity based on ignorance of the realities of his profession may leave his real needs unmet, for example, in the paucity of incentives that MC1 spoke about for encouraging quality research in Oxbridge and London. Equally, promoting MC1’s ethnicity risked developing a deep understanding of his needs, for example, in progressing his career as an early career researcher, which MC1 saw as an endemic problem for all early-career medical researchers in the UK then. Focusing on BME labels may therefore harm East Asian academics like him who required recognition of, and support for, their potential. This requirement could only be satisfied at the level of policies for the progression of *all* early career medical researchers, and not merely for certain ethnic minorities. Thus, for example,

⁶ Asians in USA often refer to ‘East Asians’ (typically, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese), following their immigration history to USA since the 19th century.

among clinical researchers, awarding career opportunities only to BME medical researchers based on their ethnicity to the exclusion of other researchers, including other ethnic minorities, would be unworkable because of the complex nature of medical research, which typically needs to involve large teams.

Yet MC1 was drawn to look for opportunities in Southeast Asia where he originated when his search in the UK produced unsatisfactory results. While Southeast Asia was an obvious geographical area for him to move to given his family roots, in fact MC1's interest in progressing his career in Chinese East Asia was opportunistic as he sensed there were more opportunities for qualified young researchers, for example, in Singapore and Hong Kong. MC1 therefore took a view that his ethnicity was important for his employers although this was less important to him as a reason for choosing to move back to Chinese East Asia as he would have been happy to stay in the UK.

Subsequently, however, MC1's Chinese ethnicity did play a role in his decision to stay in predominantly ethnic Chinese Singapore, when he started a family and decided that Singapore offered an excellent family environment. This view of Singapore that he subsequently developed as a more family-friendly environment than the UK for raising his East Asian family was not a motivating factor at the time when he decided to move to Singapore in the early 1990s.

Overall, MC1's view of his ethnicity in relation to his career choice and subsequent progression within his chosen career were driven by the following factors, which seemed to remain consistent through his early and mid-career development:

- Connectivity of employers with international networks,
- Culturally open research centres of excellence, and
- Employers' record of attracting external research funding.

MC2 shared a number of personal features with MC1, including a positive view of career advancement in the UK, while he also viewed as an opportunity the possibility of developing his early career in Southeast Asia. Likewise, MC2 believed that he had never been professionally discriminated against in the UK. Yet, since the turn of the 20th century he observed that his ethnicity has been categorised in staff surveys and student events as "BME". While this categorisation has had no perceptible impact on his career, nonetheless he believes that the BME categorisation, in which he had been included without consent or consultation, has prompted him to imagine himself as a BME member in playing this role, for example, in public events inside and outside his employing university, where he has been invited to speak "as his university's only BME professor". Although he recognises a personal benefit in being invited to speak in this role, nonetheless the identity within which MC2 has been asked to position himself is contrived and artificial. Instead, he believed that his ethnicity played no role in his award of a university chair where he was required to fulfil the same requirements as other applicants regardless of anyone's ethnicity.

MC2's views of his ethnicity did however differ from MC1 in the idiosyncratic way that MC2 portrayed his career choices. For example, he expressed his ability and non-preference in working either in Chinese East Asia or the UK as an "ambidextrous" skill that he had developed from his English élite education. This skill was positioned as a core ability that he adapted and developed to suit different cultural environments of his choice. This

adaptability also enabled him to be socially acceptable within Chinese East Asian as well as various western European environments that he had learned about at boarding school. MC2's ambidexterity includes his linguistic transcultural skills and transdisciplinary education backgrounds. As a polyglot, he speaks several European languages.

Both MC1 & MC2's views of their individual choices appear to clash with Wilkinson's (1964) perspective of "the Victorian public school ethos", which he argued "closely resembled political assumptions underlying the British Constitution" (p. 33). Here, a core assumption was the indoctrination of a collective loyalty for public service among public schoolboys that Wilkinson (1964) suggested was a fixed, intransient feature of public school education from their founding as preparatory schooling for future political leaders and civil servants. Watters (2016) goes further in providing longitudinal evidence of a positive correlation between elite private schooling and high-status employment in Britain beyond public service. He argues that 'old boys' networks' continue to be structured in such a way as to "assist [former schoolboys] to obtain employment in particular high-status professions and areas of businesses" (p. 101). An important, supporting institution behind English boys' boarding schools was a number of girls' boarding schools that promulgated a complementary role for "genteel" girls in a male-centric ethos of public leadership (Wilkinson, 1964, p. 70).

These perspectives of collective loyalty miss an important fact in understanding the idiosyncratic views of MC1 & MC2. This fact is in the individual, and often self-centred, individualist, role that Prefects were able to develop. While the title of Wilkinson's (1964) book suggests its focus on the role of Prefects in "British leadership", in fact we see little discussion about Prefects and non-Prefects in the book. Similarly, while Watters (2016) provides evidence of significant alumni work at a number of elite boys' schools, we do not see any data evidencing connections between alumni associations and any of the professions cited in the paper. What is the quantitative evidence for the employment of former elite schoolboys among prominent professional and other firms? Did ethnicity matter in the operations of 'old boys' networks'?

Our data from MC1 & MC2 suggest that their Chinese ethnicity in UK HE did matter for their positional identities in this field. Ethnicity mattered for these CMEs when they leveraged their status in a positive, personal way, firstly as Prefects, but also equally as international sons of educated, ethnic Chinese families. This provenance was secure in the sense that our two CMEs were anchored in their ethnic identity. Moreover, the CME provenance suggested their distinctiveness, not as a separate ethnic group that demanded equality and diversity, but as leaders among the white majority of their school peers whose networks, including old boys' networks, either did not provide, or no longer provided, the certain employment that Watters (2016) suggested.

Here, Hirsch (2018) makes a similar point when she explains the difficulty many white Britons have in making sense of her complicated, mixed ethnicity. Hirsch, a well-known journalist, broadcaster, barrister and human rights development worker, was born in [Norway](#) to an English father and a Ghanaian mother, and raised in London. Her paternal grandfather, being Jewish, fled Berlin in 1938. Hirsch (2018) narrates that her white British peers typically end up categorising her as "black" due to their insecurity, as opposed to hers. Our Group 1 respondents reacted to the insecurity among their white peers by carving an

identity as prefect-leaders, eventually among HE communities that they chose to work in, where they could legitimately speak, for example, for all junior medical researchers (MC1), regardless of ethnicity, because they were secure in their own self-identity as CMEs.

Accordingly, our findings suggest that the dual individualist *and* collective behaviour of MC1 and MC2 was a learning outcome of their élite school experience as Prefects. Here, rather than being subject to collective loyalty, as Prefects they may have developed an *élitist* behavioural approach that was distinct from the collective loyalty among boys were not Prefects. In this scenario, instead of their East Asian identity limiting personal opportunities, in fact their status as Prefects and ethnic Chinese elevated them to a privileged position that other Prefects who were not ethnic Chinese may not have enjoyed:

“The phrase “First among Equals” also has resonance in the public school environment. All boys in public school were nominally equal; but there were boys who were needed to run the day to day affairs of the school and/or their house. Those boys were Prefects, and because of the social nature of boarding schools where boys lived in close proximity, boys who were in charge of the activities of other boys tended to become immensely powerful and influential within their group.” (MC2)

The respected, privileged positions of MC1 and MC2 as Prefects may then at least partly explain why MC1 & MC2 were able to work within the milieu of mainly white British medical researchers in Oxbridge in the 1980s (MC1) and of investment bankers in the City of London (MC2) without apparent discrimination. At that time, these communities were among a number of professional communities that continued to maintain a concentration of public schoolboys and boarding school influence, and which practiced *élitist* cultures of their own (Watters, 2016). Key similarities and differences between MC1 and MC2 in their perceived relationship between their élite education and CME identities may be thus presented:

Table 1: Comparative Social Identities of Sampled CMEs

	Citizenship	Schooling	Status in School	University	BME Identity	Ethnic Identity	Career Pathway	Family	Career Pathway
MC1	Malaysian	Boarding in England from age 13	House Prefect	Cambridge	Negative; Opposed	CME: Southeast Asian & Anglo-Saxon	UK, followed by Singapore	Malaysian & Singapore Chinese	UK, Singapore
MC2	Malaysian	Boarding in England from age 10	School Prefect	Cambridge	Negative; Neutral	CME: Southeast Asian & Western European	Southeast Asia, followed by UK	Malaysian & Singapore Chinese	Southeast Asia, UK, Germany

Positional identities of East Asian international academics - against the East Asian stereotype

Among the interviewees who came to the UK for postgraduate studies and / or for work, an East Asian female academic working in a post-92 university narrates her story, in which she feels as if she were a stranger who has been silenced in the BME policy discourse:

“When people casually ask if the bullying I experienced in my previous (pre-92) university (before moving to the current one) was due to racism, I strongly deny. I think such attribute is a psychological projection and oversimplifies the complex situation....

When BME academics or white British academics with working class backgrounds talk about their experiences of 'impostor' syndrome in the traditional academic environment, I feel silenced because I am not one of them. I am very comfortable with traditional academe due to my academic family background and upbringing. I went to traditional private Christian schools and both of my parents and paternal grandparents and also my maternal grandfather were professors. My grandparents had studied abroad in major universities: Columbia, UC Berkeley, Toronto, Tohoku Imperial University, and Peking Union Medical College in the 1920s and 30s. They were pioneers in their fields of studies and leaders in my country. My grand uncle who had also studied in the USA became the Minister of Defence and also the first Ambassador to the UK.

In fact, I am the only one in my family who chose London for postgraduate studies. Obviously, I am an Anglophile and Europhile. London has become my intellectual home, and that is why I returned to London after working at the major university in my home country. I love cosmopolitan London and being immersed in the European intellectual tradition.

I greatly appreciate the UK government's widening participation in HE policy, and I am very proud of my current institution's strong commitment to fighting for social justice and social change. However, I don't really define myself in racial, ethnic terms. I don't have a "chip on my shoulder", which is the term I actually heard from a fellow BME colleague recently. On the contrary, I enjoy being a foreigner here. I find my inside-outsider position useful for my academic work and life in general."

(Excerpt from an East Asian female interview narrative, 11/2017)

Most of our ten East Asian interviewees - except three, a Korean-American female academic in Sociology whose subject area was ethnic studies, a Taiwanese-Canadian who has expertise in intercultural communication and a Chinese-Australian female academic in interdisciplinary Social Sciences - did not consider their positions in relation to the BME policy framework for racial equality and diversity agenda. Among the ten East Asian non-British nationals interviewed in this research project, two academics did not even know what BME exactly stands for. Two East Asian academics, one in natural science and the other in social sciences who came to the UK to work, talked about their difficulties in decoding tacit cultural meanings embedded in everyday communication at work. A Taiwanese-Canadian male academic, despite his education in the USA and Canada since childhood, finds that British English communication style is far more indirect and it takes time to learn to read between the lines and learn to understand what his native British manager really meant.

A Chinese male researcher in Cognitive Psychology expressed his anxiety over the BME labelling. He was comfortably aware of his cultural difference as being an international Chinese scholar working in the UK but he has never thought that he has been disadvantaged in his workplace because of his race or ethnicity. A Chinese female Lecturer in Sociology who had worked in Hong Kong before her doctorate in Cambridge and now works in a plate glass university in England shared a similar view. She is interested and engaged in gender issues in academia and also being critical of the UKBA red tape. Her university is required to check constantly her whereabouts outside the term dates due to her Tier-2 visa status as a non-UK national. However, she cannot recall any critical incident in relation to her race/ethnicity. The "BME" identification does not feel relevant to her either.

By contrast, a Chinese-Australian female professor reflected on her positional identity:

My background is later generation Australia-born Chinese, and often that is how I see my identity, although this depends on the context a little. For instance, I mostly feel Australian in a British context, as I am aware my accent is Australian and many British people relate on the basis of accent.

However, on some occasions I identify as someone who is visibly Chinese, particularly when I wish to offer support to fellow academics and students who are from a non-white background.

Ironically, I always felt "foreign" in my own country of Australia, as there is still a significant, if unconscious, "White Australia" bias there. Ironically, although this was not the reason I left Australia, I feel less "foreign" in the UK, as it is a bigger society and used to more diversity. In Canada I felt foreign, but this was mostly because it was a small and insular community where anyone from elsewhere tended to feel this way.

On internationalisation:

I have always felt the academy was an international enterprise. It seems obvious that having foreign academics should contribute to internationalisation, but much of it depends on how their experience and expertise is used.

From my experience in the UK, I would say that there is not near enough systematic harnessing of this experience, and I suspect that much of this happens informally, on the initiative of the foreign academics themselves. There does need to be more attention to how internationalisation happens across the whole university - not just through research (which is perhaps the most obvious way that foreign academics can contribute) or attracting international students, but through curriculum and policy development, as well as cultural change in their institutions.

On the Racial Equality and Diversity policy and practice:

I feel foreign again now, in a way, as I try to champion issues of diversity at my university, but I have little official role or authority, despite my own background and academic expertise in this matter. I feel like I am still trying to do things unofficially, and from the margins, which in some ways is how people from marginal backgrounds have to operate to get what they want done.

(Excerpt from a Chinese-Australian female professor interview narrative, 8/2016)

This statement resonates what Chong (2016), an East Asian American College President in USA who is also a co-founder of APAHE (Asia Pacific Americans in Higher Education), says: "Oftentimes, Asian Americans in higher education are the workhorses and not the show horses... They're people behind the scenes doing a lot of the work without getting credit for it, and when it comes time to consider bringing these people forward to an executive-level position, they're often overlooked." (<http://diverseeducation.com/article/83772/>)

Regarding the stereotype of hard working East Asian academics, a Southeast Asian male early career academic in a Russell Group university interviewed in this research took it for granted to put extra effort into work and socialising. Having moved between several countries (the UK, US, France, and Denmark) to study and work in several disciplines, he has learned polymath approaches. He understands it is necessary for him as an international academic - regardless of race and ethnicity - to learn the rules of his host society. He appreciates British small talk, the British way of socialising, being funny in British way – not explicit but important to learn to become good colleagues.

Regarding the BME policy category and racial identity politics, he says:

"I don't think of myself falling into that category because of my upbringing. I know I am being categorised in the BME group, but I don't think I am the short end of the stick. I am not part of repression and discrimination. In my department, there are three non-white academics but I am the only non-white non-British national. In my workplace, I have never experienced any discrimination. The racial equality and diversity policy discourse indicates that the UK is explicitly multicultural. In that regard, I don't feel I need to work so hard to fit in the UK society. I feel more at home here than in Scandinavia."

(Filipino interview data, 10 April 2018).

In fact, he never thought of himself in racial ethnic terms. He says he has always identified himself by his nationality. For academic career advancement, he asserts: “I don’t think you should play that [BME] card”. He thinks class distinction is more significant than race/ethnicity, and the wide spectrum of diversity within the BME category is elided into the black and poor widening participation beneficiaries – which is the point also acknowledge in the Runnymede Report in 2011 (Weekes-Bernard, 2011). He suggests it may be useful to have a new category: BPME (black and poor minority ethnic) group.

Among the twelve interviewees, there was only one female academic (from Southeast Asia) Senior Lecturer in a top university Business School attributed her experience of unfair treatments in promotion to covert racial inequality and discrimination. She has faithfully followed the advice from her former mentor in her previous (Russell Group) university, who is an Asian (Indian) academic, saying that ethnic minority academics need to “work ten-times harder than White British academics”. Although she has never participated in the BME network in her university, she is also aware of the mainstream BME narratives: “BME academics are less likely to occupy professorial positions, are more likely to encounter issues of wage disparity and are significantly less likely to gain employment opportunities in HE more generally. They are also less likely to benefit from a permanent/open-ended contract of employment.” (Arday, 2015, p. 5).

By comparison, a Japanese female academic working in a Russell Group University Business School expressed her view of the BME policy framework for equality and diversity and her positional identity differently:

“Why do I need to be bothered about my ethnicity that is not related to my academic work? I think the BME advocacy policy will make no tangible outcome. I have never experienced racism. I wouldn’t be bothered. I don’t want to spend time on racial politics. I really don’t think the BME policy package based on racial ethnic categories will help my academic career progression. I believe in meritocracy. The common view of “hard working” is not necessarily the trait of East Asian academics or ethnic minority, and individual work ethics is not related to the ethnic minority position. There are just individual attributes, individual choices and individual disadvantages. I don’t benchmark the British or anyone. I am happy to live in limbo. Being categorised as Japanese doesn’t help. I like the freedom to define myself. I don’t need to follow the game. For the moment, I enjoy not being categorised.”

(Japanese female lecturer, Russell Group University Business School, March 2018).

At the same time, she thinks international academics make distinctive contributions to the internationalisation of UK universities and new knowledge creation:

“Yes, these people add the diversity of the university culture. My academic colleagues in my immediate unit are UK, Romanian, Italian, Canadian nationalities. Business Schools also count the nationalities of staff as it matters for some accreditation, I think... There are so many non-UK colleagues. Sometimes British may feel minority? I like this diversity of the British HEIs and I do hope this diversity remains after Brexit...

... New knowledge creation, generally yes as people tend to utilise international networks. In my case I currently collaborate with my former colleague in Sweden, for example, where I did my postdoctoral before coming back to the UK. These networks come and go and there is a serendipity. I also collaborate with academics in Japan, but that is not much with cultural proximity, it was more about the data set they had and the complementarity of research approaches.”

(Excerpt from a narrative interview with a Japanese female lecturer in a Russell Group University Business School, March 2018).

Discussion and Conclusion

Drawing on Mills (1959), we developed biographical narratives to explore the intricate relationship between individual lived experiences and social structures and movements that motivated this paper. Reflecting on those narratives, we have observed a number of behavioural traits of East Asian academics in their career choices in UK HE. The following Table summarises findings from our research, and we draw on common and dissimilar behavioural traits in our findings as a basis for developing our principal contribution:

Table 2: Summary of Findings

Survival & Success (“Ambidextrous”) Behavioural Traits of CME Respondents in UK HE Ranked by Strength	Group 1 Traits (S= Strong; M= Moderate; W= Weak)	Group 2 Traits
Survival traits:		
1. International networks and outlook	S	S
2. Collective loyalty within work environment	S	S
3. Low-profile public stance	S	S
4. Resilient	S	S
5. Positive and interactive	S	M
6. Non-confrontational and accommodating	S	M
7. Listening	M	S
Success Traits:		
1. Stranger but not a victim	S	S
2. Motivation to excel within established system	S	S
3. Linguistic polyglot	S	S
4. Cultural literacy (“reading between the lines”)	M	S
5. Networks within Establishment (e.g. to secure internal and external research funding)	S	W
6. Ethnic pride	W	S
7. Political & Social Collaboration with Establishment	M	W

Source: Project interview data

This list summarises distinctive behavioural traits that are drawn from our interview data. The traits do not constitute a checklist of universal traits for all East Asian academics to survive and thrive in UK HE. Establishing such a checklist is not our purpose. Rather, the behavioural traits in Table 2 appear to have been developed by our East Asian interviewees at various stages of their careers in UK HE. We draw on this list for our discussion below.

For our CME interviewees, the two sets of behavioural traits enabled each group to choose work and social environments in and beyond UK HE where they have carved and preserved their own, respective identities. The self-identities of our interviewees have therefore “survived”, based either on their formative learning as CMEs in their adopted, elite environment where they schooled (MC1), or as international East Asian academics outside their countries of birth (MC2). This formative learning produced behavioural traits for survival that were strongest among both Groups 1 and Group 2 in four traits that they shared, namely, international networks and outlook, collective loyalty, individuality and resilience. There was more variation in the strength of behavioural traits for success, as may be expected, given the different disciplines of our CME respondents. Nonetheless, CMEs in both Groups exhibited strong and largely similar success traits that built on survival traits that were also largely similar.

Although the diversity agenda has thrown important light on cultural and overt discriminatory behaviour, the ways in which our CME interviewees coped with their adopted UK HE environment by crafting a “cultural toolkit” of behavioural skills in Table 2 appears to clash with the equality and diverse agenda in BME. Our Discussion now sets out a number of key areas where the behavioural skills of our research sample are compared and contrasted with certain provisions of the BME policy framework. We then suggest how this discussion may contribute to the further development of CRT. Here, our core contribution is in exploring a number of possible implications of “ambidextrous” behaviour, which involved sampled academics in both groups as they crafted behavioural skills in order to survive in their adopted UK HE environment and to then thrive in their preferred international work environments in and beyond the UK.

First, our Group 1 interviewees supported a status quo which did not confer equality and diversity for their CME status. Indeed, they developed adaptive skills initially to cope and interact with a non-BME environment in their boarding school education, and to then achieve a level of success in that environment. Similarly, Group 2 interviewees believed that they had established their careers in UK HE based solely on the quality of their research, and that the policy mantra of BME diversity and equality had been unnecessary in achieving this goal. Interviewees in both groups expressed concern that further dissemination of the policy could in fact harm their career development by distinguishing them, implicitly or otherwise, as a “victimized” minority, and not on the basis of their work.

By contrast with the model minority dialectic, our East Asians had achieved their success to the disadvantage, if not at the expense, of prevailing norms, such as BME diversity and equality. For example, a notable feature of ambidexterity was that it was not a negative, reactive perspective of coping with an adverse environment for ethnic minorities (cf. Hirsch, 2018), including CMEs. Instead, unlike British-born blacks in Hirsch (2018), our sampled CMEs crafted skills, very artfully, to thrive in their chosen academic careers, principally by exploiting institutional mechanisms and the prevailing culture in favour of meritocratic excellence. For all our interviewees, this culture in the UK prioritised excellence in HE research. Table 2 therefore also sets out behavioural traits that have supported the ability of our sampled academics to thrive in environments that they astutely chose. A constituent element of this choice was in their acute observation, based on their formative experience in boarding school (Group 1) and their international study and work experience (Group 2), of suitable research environments where they believed that they could thrive by applying their ambidextrous skills in both halves of Table 2.

Some of those skills suggested by our two Group 1 respondents seemed to be distinctive skills that our other non-CME respondents did not share. Fundamentally, “thriving” skills such as their insider networks and political support of established policies and practices were related to the “elitist identities” (Table 1) that both had developed, first in their home environment, and then in a new, adopted environment which was not dissimilar in the skills that as CMEs in Malaysia their families had also developed and practiced for their survival. Hence, CM1 chose to work in Oxbridge and London University medical departments, which he justified in terms of their international excellence, whereas an underlying rationale for this choice was in fact his ability to thrive in universities that were culturally familiar to him.

Other CME academics in our sample were also deeply motivated to excel within their adopted British environment. While these academics had not been schooled in the UK and did not share Establishment networks, they nonetheless exhibited other behavioural traits that motivated a shared ambition for success in their adopted UK environment, typically by leveraging social skills around resilience and flexibility that reflected a deeply interactive stance in their ability to survive and thrive in their adopted environment. This core, positive behavioural stance was shared by all CMEs.

Measures of “thriving” were the same for both Groups in peer recognition for their scholarly contributions, but these were not necessarily the same metrics as their white counterparts. For example, all our CMEs accepted their status as strangers in, as opposed to being victims of, a white-dominant social environment in the UK. This status, which we explored in our literature review, was an important trait that motivated our interviewees to succeed as they sought to carve out their reputation as strangers who were nonetheless good academics. Accordingly, while they disliked being viewed as strangers, all interviewees were able to develop an interactive response with their work environment that effectively marginalized any manifestation of white privilege. The educational benefits that those CMEs who had been educated in UK boarding school and university were able to derive for their cultural literacy (Group 2) and Establishment networks (Group 1) served as a prominent example of this outcome. This and other distinctive East Asian features of Table 2 suggest the unusual meaning of “low-profile” as a strategic choice for our interviewees to gain political influence among a white majority. Indeed, low-profile was fundamentally incompatible with the status of a “model minority” as our interviewees, being internationally mobile, were not content to act out this or any other role ascribed to them by their peers.

For BME policy, the interactive, resilient response of East Asian academics to prevailing cultural norms in UK HE suggests that CRT should include an ambidextrous perspective that supports interaction with, and adaptation among, well-educated East Asians. This same outcome may also be supported in other minority groups with a similar international profile as our East Asians. A principal requirement here would be in laying aside, at least for a trial period within the “meritocratic” culture of UK HE, any imperative need for equality and diversity as a “solution” for endemic social problems of inequality. Apropos, by persisting with a mantra of diversity and equality, our findings have suggested the danger of throwing the interests of certain ethnic minorities out with the bathwater by alienating East Asian academics that BME policy seeks to protect. This BME policy view of one-size-fits all labelling of ethnic minorities applies also to our shorthand of CMEs, which the logic of our argument suggests should also be discarded for the same reason that we have argued BME policy should be discarded for our ambidextrous interviewees. All labelling is potentially harmful to the practice of their behavioural traits as it can undermine them.

Instead, what we suggest as our principal contribution of this paper is the ability of all our sampled East Asian academics to thrive, without merely surviving, in both their home and adopted environments. Principally, they were able to do so by drawing on skills they had learned to thrive in their adopted formative environments to also excel in similar environments beyond the UK that they had chosen to engage with for their career development (MC1 & MC2). These skills were in fact adaptable beyond a boarding school (Group 1) or HE (Group 2) environment and the specific professionals and business areas that scholars have identified for white, privileged élites (Watters, 2016; Wilkinson, 1964).

This notion of a privileged and apparently socially impenetrable “circle” of white privilege has been reinforced by anecdotes of the continuing social experience of Britons who have carved their own identities that are distinct from white privilege (Hirsch, 2018; Irving, 2014).

For our sampled East Asians, the existence of this “circle” was less relevant than whether they were able to create “new knowledge” (Japanese academic), in a formal sense in their work, but also personally, in new knowledge of applying or augmenting their cultural toolkit. Whether subconsciously (Group 2) or openly (Group 1), this toolkit motivated our interviewees to survive *and* thrive. In doing so, they actively participated in building the “multinational culture” that a number of East Asian academics observed was a feature of UK HE. Here, an observation is that East Asians, in fact, have been constituting and reconstituting this culture in a creative way, and in so doing they have begun to move the social agenda in UK HE beyond multiculturalism, and thereby beyond equality and diversity.

In this sense, the “Yellow Peril” has indeed become transformed and may also have transformed an environment, UK HE, beyond a focal concern on equality and diversity. While white Britons could legitimately fear this “low-profile” development of the Yellow Peril, they and other ethnic minorities could also learn from, as well as work with, ambidextrous social perspectives that can have benign outcomes. Here the Yellow Peril appears to have become neither offensive nor defensive, but adaptive- often creatively so, and supportive. Possibly “yellow” East Asians of our sampled have become too supportive, as our Filipino interviewee suggests, when East Asians are faced with discrimination against others, and may then need to emerge from their low-profile role and create differently by actively questioning whether UK HE is as “multicultural” as it appears. We have suggested how this active “low-profile” nature of ambidexterity as both socially passive-loyal and yet individually pro-active has in fact become a new norm for some time now, at least among both groups of our sampled academics.

Tokenism

The editor of *The Good Immigrant* (2016) Nikesh Shukla says: “But diversity is the wrong word – diversity is the celebration of otherness, often filtered through a white male perspective. He says “I don’t want to be celebrated for what makes me different... I very much hope we can stop being short-sighted about diversity, and get to the point where writers can just be writers”. The essays in the volume interrogate a British national culture trapped in a post-imperial state of nostalgia. There is a strong sense throughout that a white universal experience is the norm against which black and Asian writers must racialise themselves for a reading audience.”

Furthermore, “being a model minority is like being on perpetual probation” as well as denying an individual’s complexity. All in all, even in the field of promoting diversity and inclusivity, we are battling with epistemic power relations in narrating subjectivity.

Another layer of East Asian Stereotype: micro-aggression, invisibility and non-inclusion

Bari Weiss, a New York Times op-ed writer and editor, tweeted “Immigrants: they get the job done,” along with a video of Nagasu (Japanese American) when she became the first American woman to land a triple axel in the 2018 Winter Olympic competition on 12 February 2018. Weiss’ tweet sparked controversy on social media then because Nagasu is

not an immigrant. She was born in California to Japanese immigrants and is an American citizen. This episode reveals a common public perception of Asian-Americans seen as immigrants, regardless of generation, as “the perpetual foreigner” (Huffington Post 2018). This may be a long surviving legacy of the “yellow peril” - the perception that if you're Asian, you can never become American; you can never be a full member of this society.

Yellow peril in silence

In the UK, the public discourse of the Chinese or other East Asian people is not really heard especially in line with the racial equality and diversity policy and practice. According to the BBC report (31 January 2018), citing Dr Ashley Thorpe, there is less awareness of racial politics surrounding East Asians, compared to Black and South Asian groups: "British East Asians are considered a neoliberal, multicultural success story"; so people are often unaware of the racism that they do encounter... They are characterised as being content, hard working at school, and with nothing to complain about." (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-42859476>).

Many argue that the US entertainment industry is ahead of the UK when it comes to minority representation. Perhaps there is resemblance in academia when we look at the (racial/ethnic) identity politics on campus. So far there is lack of East Asian representation, and their voices have not been heard in the Equality and Diversity policy-making process, let alone institutional practice in UK universities - perhaps due to the highly individualised East Asian academics' positioning and their voluntary non-participation in the BME policy discourse. However, as Daniel York in the BBC interview report says, “this is precisely why British East Asians should continue speaking up. We've been very good at edging ourselves out of the race and diversity debate [until now]... the trouble is, if you don't make a noise you'll get sidelined and ignored.” (BBC, 31 January 2018: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-42859476>).

As the number of East Asian (notably Chinese) students has notably increased in UK universities more recently - by more than 2,000, a 20% increase on 2017 (*The Guardian*, 5 February 2018: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/feb/05/uk-universities-rise-in-applications-eu-students>), time is right to broaden up and diversify the BME Equality and Diversity policy framework and discourse.

In *The Established and Outsiders*, Norbert Elias and Scotson (2008 [1965]) theorises the sociology of power by a small-scale investigation into the process of domination and discrimination: a differential in the power ratio between groups, where feelings of belonging and not-belonging, of being perceived as authentic or anomic, gain more importance than a singular demarcation by race/ethnicity, nationality, religion, or different culture/civilisation to explain the process of othering and marginalisation. This aspect is much reflected in the Chinese-Australian female professor's biographical narrative and her positioning identity illustrated earlier.

Likewise, in terms of power relations, dynamics and executions in a business organisation, Reynolds and Lewis (2017) reports the significance of ‘cognitive diversity’ for business success – instead of box-ticking diversity based on the conventional criteria such as race, ethnicity, gender, etc:

"Received wisdom is that the more diverse the teams in terms of age, ethnicity, and gender, the more creative and productive they are likely to be. But having run the execution exercise around the world more than 100 times over the last 12 years, we have found no correlation between this type of diversity and performance. ... Since there is so much focus on the importance of diversity in problem solving, we were intrigued by these results. If not diversity, what accounted for such variability in performance? We wanted to understand what led some groups to succeed and others to crash and burn. This led us to consider differences that go beyond gender, ethnicity, or age. We began to look more closely at cognitive diversity.... When we have a strong, homogenous culture (e.g. an engineering culture, an operational culture, or a relational culture), we stifle the natural cognitive diversity in groups through the pressure to conform. ... If cognitive diversity is what we need to succeed in dealing with new, uncertain, and complex situations, we need to encourage people to reveal and deploy their different modes of thinking. There is much talk of authentic leadership, i.e., being yourself. Perhaps it is even more important that leaders focus on enabling others to be themselves." (Harvard Business Review, 30/3/2017: <https://hbr.org/2017/03/teams-solve-problems-faster-when-theyre-more-cognitively-diverse>)

In conclusion, our research shows that compartmentalising ethnic identity is limited to explain minority-majority power relations and accompanying epistemic, symbolic capital as well as violence. There is an urgent need to consider implications of the 'yellow peril' legacy (of the late 19th and early 20th century) for the contemporary ethno-racial politics in HE and international relations.

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